

THE WELLESLEY HISTORY CENTER

A CONCEPT WHOSE TIME HAS COME



Wellesley Historical Society



THE CONCEPT OF A HISTORY CENTER

The role of a history center in community life is to preserve and present the past in a way that enables the townspeople to understand and enjoy their collective history. While the center can also serve as the nexus of a local historical society, it can provide a larger cultural purpose for the community at large with:

- Local history displays
- Archival storage facilities
- Special exhibits
- Genealogical and research areas
- A lecture hall
- Administrative facilities

THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

The Wellesley Historical Society maintains its offices, collections, and archives at 229 Washington Street in the Dadmun-McNamara House, which was built in 1824. While a nice example of early 19th-century residential architecture, the structure is woefully inadequate for storage, programs, and displays of the Society's collections. The mission statement of the Society is as follows:

To serve as the historical resource center for the Town of Wellesley; to provide educational programs; to collect, interpret and display materials pertaining to the history of the Town and its people; to inspire public involvement in and appreciation of its heritage and culture.

The Society's Board of Directors has known for some time that while the Society is fully committed to and is living up to its mission, it is doing so under very difficult conditions.



A Hazelton portrait

- Display space is severely limited and most collections cannot be displayed
- The pressing need for storage space has resulted in file boxes that are kept in hallways, aisles, and attic spaces
- Display areas must also be used simultaneously as work areas and for storage
- Office space doubles as archival, research, and storage space
- There are no dedicated research, work, or display facilities



SOME OF THE SOCIETY'S COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

The Society has some wonderful collections but due to space limitations they cannot be properly displayed. These include:

- The Denton butterflies
- The Oldham Lace Collection
- Fifty paintings by Wellesley artist Mary Brewster Hazelton
- Works by Isaac Sprague IV, noted botanical illustrator
- Extensive collection of 19th- and 20th-century photographs
- 19th-century toy collection
- Artifacts that have been given to the Society over time
- The costume and textile collection



The Society also serves as the archives for a number of town organizations and important collections including:

- Historical Commission, home records
- Katharine Lee Bates Papers
- Maugus Club, records
- Newcomers Club, records
- Town Reports, 1885–2002, and Maps
- Wellesley Arts and Crafts Guild
- Wellesley Club, records
- Wellesley Garden Club, records
- Wellesley Farms Neighborhood Club
- Wellesley Hills Woman's Club
- Wellesley properties and plot plans
- *Wellesley Townsman*, 1891–1975



Katharine Lee Bates



Above: just five of the more than 1,500 specimens in the Denton Butterfly and Moth Collection

AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOWCASE THE HISTORY OF WELLESLEY



This mural of John Eliot preaching to the Indians is one of four in the Massachusetts State House commemorating major events in state history. After preaching to the Indians in Newton, he settled them in what is now Wellesley and Natick.

Wellesley's history begins virtually at the dawn of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which was settled in 1630.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony and Wellesley – 1651

The first settlement in what is now Wellesley was established in 1651 by the Apostle to the Indians, John Eliot, and a group of Native Americans. Eliot applied for a grant of 2,000 acres on which to settle the Indians, and the land they were given stretched from just west of Lake Waban to the falls in South Natick. These same Indians were to play a tragic role in King Philip's War.

Wellesley and the Revolutionary War

While everyone is familiar with Paul Revere and his midnight ride, there were other riders who spread the word that fateful night, and one came to Wellesley in April of 1775 to let the area Minutemen know that the British were coming. The word was brought to Bullard's Tavern near Lake Waban on Washington Street. The area Minutemen gathered at the Kingsbury Farm (where Wellesley Country Club is now located) and marched to Menotomy to fight the British as they retreated from Concord.

The Gilded Age – the Hunnewells and the Railroads

Horatio Hollis Hunnewell was an investment banker who made his fortune in railroads. He built an impressive white mansion overlooking Lake Waban as a summer home in 1852. The many gifts Hunnewell made to the town include the Town Hall and the land it occupies. The first train arrived here in 1835, thus assuring the town's development as a Boston suburb.

The Private Colleges and Schools

The town contains four private colleges and schools: Wellesley College, Babson College, Dana Hall School, and Tenacre Country Day School. Wellesley College is significant in that it was one of the country's first colleges for women, and Babson in that it was one of the first business schools.

ISAAC SPRAGUE AND OUR SHARED HERITAGE

Isaac Sprague V was a founding member and then first president of the Wellesley Historical Society, a position he held for more than 15 years. He also gave the land for the first home of the Friendly Aid Association at One Grantland Road in 1924. Sprague lived at a time when wealthy individuals often took a very generous, perhaps paternalistic, view of the communities where they lived. A real estate developer and banker, he was instrumental in developing the Abbott Estates, and he served as president of the Wellesley National Bank and a member of the first board of directors of the Wellesley Trust Company, which opened in 1923.

Sprague's imprint on the town was significant. In addition to his gift to the Friendly Aid Association, he gave the land and stone for the Hills branch library. He chaired the building committees for what would become the Sprague Clock Tower and the Sprague School, and he gave the cupola and clock that adorn the school. He also bought and put in trust the land and building that became the American Legion hall in 1922.

Sprague chaired the building committee for the clock tower at left. At right, the portrait of Sprague that is in the Dadmum-McNamara House.



In 1870, Wellesley College was founded by Pauline and Henry Fowle Durant, who devoted their entire fortune and 300-acre estate to a college for women after their son died. They believed that women were greatly undervalued by society.



This portrait of Horatio Hollis Hunnewell by Mary Brewster Hazelton hangs in the lobby of the main library. The Town Hall that he decided to the town in 1887 also included a library to which he gave 10,000 books.



The railroads were a critical factor in the growth of the country and Wellesley. This steam engine was at the Lower Falls station, which also provided freight services for the manufacturing that had been powered by the falls since the 1700s.



Sprague gave the stone for the Central Street fire station, the land and building for American Legion, the land and stone for the Hills branch library, and the Sprague School cupola.

THE SITE AND CHARACTER OF THE PROPOSED HISTORY CENTER

During the past few years, the Society has studied its space needs, the needs of our community, and the solutions that other towns have created for similar situations faced by their respective historical societies. The general concept for the Wellesley History Center has evolved after careful consideration of other sites, and it is the conclusion of its board that the new center should:

- Be located on the site that the Society leases from the Friendly Aid Association
- Retain, though possibly reposition, the Dadmun-McNamara House
- Develop a new structure of approximately 5,000 square feet that would connect to and share space with the Dadmun-McNamara House
- Offer adequate research, display, and storage space
- Be able to incorporate features from historic structures such as the first town hall
- Be “green” and wired for cable and IT



The proposed Wellesley History Center would be located on the same lot as the Dadmun-McNamara House, which would become a part of the Center itself.
— = boundary of Wellesley Historical Society site.

HOW THE SOCIETY CAME TO RESIDE AT 229 WASHINGTON STREET

Since its establishment in 1925, the Society has served as a repository for artifacts, writings, photographs, and other memorabilia from Wellesley’s past. The Society was incorporated as a Massachusetts non-profit in 1965. Over the years, it has been located in a number of places, including the Town Hall and the Wellesley Hills Branch Library. In 1975, the 1824 Dadmun-McNamara House, originally the home of the toll collector on the Worcester Turnpike, was given to the Society by the McNamara family and was moved to its current location thanks to a favorable lease from the Friendly Aid Association.



The move to the Dadmun-McNamara House was an important step for the Historical Society, because it afforded the Society the opportunity to operate in its own dedicated space. For a long time, the house was more than sufficient for the needs of the Society.

The Society opened the Tollhouse Shop in 2006, a successful and much-needed fundraising arm that sells gently used items at reasonable prices. The shop is located in the front parlor of the house and would continue to be an integral part of the planned Wellesley History Center.